

Mediated Learning Experience in a Community of Practice: A case study

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Abstract

This study describes an attempt to understand the quality of mediation between people within a community of practice. An innovative chefs' apprenticeship in a dedicated restaurant provides a setting in which to explore what happens when a group of young people are learning to become fully accepted members of a community of practice. The setting, the social enterprise of Fifteen London, is founded on a passionate belief in the learning potential of all individuals, regardless of background. Conducted over a period of five years this ethnographic study tells the stories of the apprentices; the story of the community; and the story of conducting the investigation. A pilot study completed in 2005 revealed that apprentices felt their experience of the culture of the learning environment had as much impact on their development as the mediation observed between individuals.

The thesis explores the theoretical implications of these findings. Drawn from a sociocultural perspective, two theoretical frameworks are applied: Mediated Learning Experience (Feuerstein, Miller and Tannenbaum, 1994) concerned with the mediation between people and its effect on human development; and Situated Learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) concerned with participation in a community of practice. These frameworks were felt to be useful to an analysis which demonstrates that a community of practice can be analysed according to the framework for Mediated Learning Experience. The symbiosis of these two approaches creates a coherent framework for discourse in which to analyse the learning process itself. A description of the community highlights the complexities of learning and the challenges of attempting to change the course of human development by means of cultural transmission and social enterprise. I conclude that this learning environment serves as a good example of what can be achieved when innovation works hand in hand with moral purpose.

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